



A Roleplaying Game of Ideals
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There was a War. A War of ideals and the lack of them, of loyalty and treachery, of ethics and economics and political necessity. The War raged until civilization was in tatters, its infrastructure ravaged, its heart broken.

The last battle of the War was fought over Agora, a planet that had been hidden and preserved as a protected wilderness, unaffected by technology's touch or civilization's tread. Its strategic value attracted limping cruisers of the various fleets, and they battled in the skies of Agora. As many ships fell from poor maintenance as from enemy fire, their last shuddering act to bring their crews to the surface of the planet.

Then word of the Peace came from far away. It came in two parts. *The War is over*, the first part said. *Do not return home* was the second. The message bore all the validation codes to prove that it was official, but before it could continue the message jerked and spasmed and died, no power left to push the transmission out into the stars. Home was dead.

There was nothing to return to, for most; for others, their return would only add to the hunger. With hostilities ended, nothing but starvation at home, and a world of plenty below them, the choice was obvious. Weakened, strained, and damaged beyond repair, the battleships descended to the planet's surface to colonize Agora.

Cut off from their homelands and looking forward at an untouched wilderness filled with former enemies, the crews must ask themselves: *how shall we live?*

Agora: *how shall we live?* is a roleplaying game for three to eight players in which you play leaders of refugees crash-landed on the surface of an untouched world. Together, you will struggle to survive and pit your ideals against former enemies, the hostile world, and each other. Throughout the course of play, you will interpret your characters' beliefs, stand up for those beliefs, and become those beliefs' exemplars in the world. Each character will shape the development of the world.

How the Dice Work

In this game you use d4s, d6s, d8, and d10s.

Generally speaking, you want to roll low, but not too low. A roll of seven, six, five, four, three, and two earns you potential success. A roll of one on a die nets you success but loses you the die.

Because you don't total up the dice, more dice is better than less dice. You always want more dice because you will have more chances of rolling low numbers.

Smaller dice are more likely to roll low, but they are also more likely to roll ones. Consequently, smaller dice represent delicate, precise, exacting things that are very effective but not very rugged or long-lasting.

Bigger dice are not as likely to roll low, but are not as likely to roll ones, either. Consequently, big dice are less efficient, unwieldy, but more reliable things that can take a beating and keep on ticking.

To be crude, let's talk weapons. A club is a d10 weapon. A sword is a d8 weapon. A gun is a d6 weapon. A laser rifle is a d4 weapon. A big sword is 3d8; a powerful laser is 3d4. See how it works?

On the other hand, dice can represent other things, too. Here's dice in terms of alliances between nations: the United States and Pakistan is something like 4d4 -- delicate, but highly useful. Modern-day France and Germany have a relationship more like 2d10 -- grudging, occasionally useful, but lasting.

Character Creation

Each player creates a group of people united through common beliefs and an individual character who stands as a representative and leader of that group. Characters are defined by their Concept, the dice they assign to Ideals and Resources, and the events they experience in the Descent to Agora.

Concept: Faction, Culture, and Background

Your character concept is who your character is distilled down into a bite-sized chunk. It incorporates the Faction, Culture, and Background that they come from, weaving those decisions together to create a unique individual with a unique set of ideals.

Select a Faction and a Culture from the following lists. These represent the political and social environment that the player comes from, and determines his first two Ideals. These choices also determine the character's starting Resources. If nothing on the list strikes your fancy, it's a simple matter to create new Factions and Cultures; this is described at the end of the book.

You will also create a Background. This can be the character's profession, family history, personal history, relationships with other player characters, or just about anything that affected the way the character saw the world. If you want to play some sort of non-human alien, the character's alien race can serve as its Background.

Keep in mind that your character represents a group of like-minded folks who may or may not have been born into the beliefs that your character was -- they will have their own reasons for believing as your character does.

Note: Not all player characters must belong to the same faction; it is more than feasible to play characters and communities from multiple factions. They may begin the game as allies working together closely, rivals that fight and bicker between themselves, or as distant strangers operating on their own.

Factions

The War's combatants included too many nations, alliances, cartels, and religious movements to count. Here are four -- they may have been the most prominent or simply the most immediate players in the player characters' experience of the War.

Each faction comes with an Ideal. Write the name of your chosen faction in the Faction section of your character sheet, and write its ideal in the space to the right. Each faction also gives the player a number of Resource and Lieutenant dice. You will record these in the Resources section of your character sheet.

The Diamond Alliance

Ideal: "Those who sacrifice liberty for security deserve neither."

Resources: 1d4 3d6 Lieutenants: 2d10

The Great Circle

Ideal: "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need."

Resources: 2d6 2d8 Lieutenants: 4d10

The Hierarchy

Ideal: "Lessers serve their betters to become greater themselves."

Resources: 1d4 1d6 2d8 Lieutenants: 3d10

The Uprising

Ideal: "The oppressed must rise up and claim what we were denied."

Resources: 2d6 4d8 Lieutenants: 3d10

Cultures

By the time of the War, the peoples of the galaxy had shifted and intermingled so thoroughly that today no culture is unknown in any faction. Here are eight of the galactic cultures. Again, these may be the eight most populous cultures in the galaxy, or the ones that the player characters know and interact with the most.

Each culture comes with an Ideal, as well. Write the name of your chosen culture in

the Culture section of your character sheet, and write its ideal in the space to the right. Each culture also gives the player a number of Resource and Lieutenant dice. Add these dice to those you received from your faction and record the total in the Resources section of your character sheet.

Ardent Orthodoxy (Ardents)

Ideal: "The Divine shapes and guides the Faithful."

Resources: 2d6 2d8 Lieutenants: 4d10

Augustan

Ideal: "My family was born to rule those without the Blood."

Resources: 2d6 2d8 Lieutenants: 3d10

Bucoli

Ideal: "Tradition gives us pragmatic solutions to modern problems."

Resources: 1d6 4d8 Lieutenants: 4d10

Greens

Ideal: "The natural world teaches us life lessons."

Resources: 1d4 1d6 2d8 Lieutenants: 3d10

The Legion (Legionnaires)

Ideal: "Life is a battlefield of victors and losers."

Resources: 3d6 4d8 Lieutenants: 2d10

Oppidan

Ideal: "Diversity combines many strengths together."

Resources: 1d4 1d6 Lieutenants: 4d10

Plutonic

Ideal: "Greed creates and commerce animates all worthwhile things."

Resources: 1d4 2d6 2d8 Lieutenants: 2d10

The Savan

Ideal: "Observation and investigation yield the curious the universe."

Resources: 2d4 1d6 Lieutenants: 2d10

Example: Character Concept

For his character, Nathan is looking to play someone with a real urge to overcome. The Uprising faction looks appropriate for that, and the Plutonic culture sounds like it will give him a means to measure his success. As for his background, Nathan decides that his character is a former slave from a plantation planet. He names his character Shar of the Mulong.

He writes Uprising and Plutonic in the tabs for faction and culture, and copies over the starting Ideals for each. He then writes "Slave" in Background and composes an Ideal to go with it: "Fear is the hand that yokes slaves to their masters." He adds up his Resources from Uprising (2d6 4d8 3d10) and Plutonic (1d4 2d6 2d8 2d10) and pencils in the totals in his Resources section: 1d4 4d6 6d8 5d10.

Assigning Dice

Now that you have your character concept, you will assign dice to the Ideals you've picked and assign the dice that you received from your Faction and Culture.

Ideals are sentences detailing what the character and his group believes. Each character has four Ideals: one taken from his Faction, another taken from his Culture, and a third that you write to represent his Background. The fourth ideal is created through roleplay in the Descent step at the end of character creation.

Distribute seven dice between the first three ideals. Make one ideal counted in d6s, one in d8s, and one in d10s. Remember, die number represents power and weight (more dice, more chances of rolling low) while die size represents significance and delicacy (smaller dice, greater efficiency; bigger dice, more reliability).

Resources are things that you can use to accomplish your goals. In addition to straightforward weapons and equipment, Resources can also represent special training, secret knowledge, access privileges, relationships, and the like. Resources can even be ephemeral things like safety or faith. All of these resources are represented with d4s, d6s, and d8s.

Your d10 dice always represent people -- your followers, assistants, soldiers, technicians, or whoever else you want backing up your character. They believe as your character believes and follow his lead, although they need not be under his formal leadership. Your d10 dice do not correspond one-to-one with individuals in your group; they correspond to people who will help you in play. You may have boatloads of people who follow your lead, but never actually come into play.

You begin with a number of Resource dice determined by your Faction and Culture. You must assign all your small dice to specific Resources, but you may leave some of your d10s unassigned. They can be assigned to new followers later, in the middle of play. Each Resource must be counted in the same die size (1d6 and 2d8, not 1d6+2d8).

Lastly, you may pair any d10 follower to any other Resource, making them a **Lieutenant**. Equipped Lieutenants have a number of dice equal to both Resources, counted in the smaller die size. The Resource is invested in the specific Lieutenant, and this binds the dice together permanently. You can not thereafter separate the Resource dice from the Lieutenant.

Example: Assigning Dice

Nathan now assigns dice to Shar's Ideals and Resources. Shar's primary motivation comes from his Uprising Ideal, so Nathan puts four of his seven Ideal dice there. Nathan figures the ex-slave Ideal is probably more potent than the Plutonic Ideal, so he puts two dice into the fear line and one die into the greed line. However, the most delicate of the three is probably the fear Ideal, so he counts that Ideal in d6s. Nathan wants his four dice in his Uprising Ideal to be effective, so he

chooses that to be his d8 Ideal, and makes the Plutonic Ideal his d10. When he's done, his Uprising Ideal is 4d8, his Plutonic Ideal is 1d10, and his ex-slave Ideal is 2d6.

Nathan then has 1d4 4d6 6d8 5d10 to assign to Resources. First he wants a couple resources that Shar can call on himself. He decides on "Charismatic Exhortation 2d6" and "Savvy Business Sense 2d8."

Then Nathan figures his band of former plantation slaves are armed with modified agricultural tools, so he starts off with "Monowire Scythes 4d8." Having extensive experience working in the fields, he also takes "Jungle Survival Experience 2d6." He needs something to unite his group together, though, and he decides to assign his sole d4 to "Sung Oral Tradition 1d4" to reflect how the Mulong tell each other of how they overthrew their plantation owners. He then creates "Gurtok the Warleader 1d10," "Zin the Scout 1d10," and "The Old One 2d10." He puts his leftover d10 into his Unassigned pool.

He pairs Gurtok with the scythes, combining the dice into 5d8; Zin with the jungle survival, combining dice into 3d6; and the Old One with the oral tradition for 3d4.

The Descent

The last step of character creation serves as a sort of tutorial for how the game works. In it, you roleplay a scene somewhere between the end of the battle above Agora and landing on the surface of the planet.

You will need to read the rules in the Structure of a Scene chapter before you can run the Descent.

The player to your left will run your Obstacle -- either the Battle, the Landfall, or your Landing Site on Agora. Pick one of the three Obstacles below for them to run for you. These Obstacles are not filed into the Library after use, and you do not harvest their complications (you get an Ideal, instead).

The Battle above Agora

Position: Civilization deserves to destroy itself. 3d6

Complications: 2d6 and 2d8

Landfall to Agora

Position: Nothing lands without paying a price. 3d6

Complications: 2d6 and 2d8

The Landing Site on Agora

Position: I will swallow anyone who settles here. 3d6

Complications: 2d6 and 2d8

The stakes of Descent scenes are defined in terms of *how* you want your character and his people to come to Agora. Perhaps you want to destroy a rival ship before they can escape down to the surface, or you want to preserve the library datacore in the fiery re-

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entry, or you want to convince your press-ganged crew to cooperate and build a base camp rather than desert into the planet's wilderness.

Play out the scene, rolling dice for Challenges and Stands, and keeping track of Fallout. If this is your first game of Agora, play all your own Lieutenants in this first scene, just to get used to how the dice work. Experienced players may choose to have other players run their Lieutenants if they like.

At the end of the Descent scene, regardless of win or lose, write your fourth and final Ideal in response to the events that brought you to Agora. Assign it 2d4 dice.

Example: Descent

Nathan decides to pit Shar against the Landing Site. He could go about setting up a base camp or finding a way to grow crops or something, but he decides to make his stakes "Establish contact with future trade partners." Jason is sitting to Nathan's left, so he will run the Landing Site in the scene.

In the course of the Descent scene, Shar sets up a lookout and radio relay station at the pinnacle of a nearby mountain. In doing so, he sacrifices some of his scythe-bearing men.

At the end of the scene, Nathan writes a Descent Ideal for Shar: "Open communication is worth dying for. 2d4"

Setting Up Scenes

Play is divided into a number of scenes. Each scene is started by one player and highlights his character, although other player characters may be involved. You may simply go around the table clockwise or have the group decide whose turn it is to lead each scene. In general, though, no one should start another scene until everyone has had a go.

When it is your turn to begin a scene, outline what your character wants to do next and what you want him to accomplish in the scene.

When you run your character, you roll your own Ideals and Resources, except for the Lieutenants being played by others.

Then you need some opposition. First go around the table and ask if any of the other player characters will oppose your player character. Most scenes will not pit two player characters against each other, however, in which case you will need an Obstacle. Go around the table and ask if any of the other players will run an Obstacle for you. If nobody else steps up, the last player left must run your Obstacle. They may make a new Obstacle or use one from the Library (more on that later).

When you run the Obstacle, you roll its Positions and Complications.

Now that you have opposition, go around the table again and ask what everyone else wants to play. The other players can either play their own characters alongside yours or they may play one of the Lieutenants on your character sheet. They may begin the scene playing a specific Lieutenant or may decide which Lieutenant to play somewhere in the course of the scene.

When you take on another player's Lieutenant, you roll the dice assigned to that Lieutenant.

Example: Setting up a Scene

It is Nathan's turn to start a scene. He explains that Shar is going to set up a mining operation in the mountains near his base camp. He goes around the table, asking for opposition. Nobody wants to pit their character against Shar (yet), but Jason agrees to play an Obstacle. Jason elects to play a Lieutenant, and will pick up whoever Nathan ends up using.

Creating Obstacles

Obstacles can be other groups of people crashlanded on Agora -- bandits or former enemies or contentious allies -- but they can just as easily be parts of the natural environment -- the woods, the weather, or native lifeforms. What is important is that they provide the characters with an opportunity to express their Ideals.

Obstacles look something like characters, but they are slightly different. In place of Ideals, Obstacles have Positions. Instead of Resources, Obstacles have Complications.

A Position can be outright hostility to the goals of the PCs or simply a reason why the Obstacle cannot or will not cooperate -- "I hate everything you stand for" works just as easily as "George will kill me if I help you." Roll a d4, d6, and d8 to determine the Obstacle's starting Positions. The d4 determines how many Positions the Obstacle starts with; the d6 and d8 determine the number of d6 and d8 dice you may assign to the Positions. If you roll a 3 on the d4, a 4 on the d6, and a 2 on the d8, you have 4d6 and 2d8 to distribute between three Positions. You must define the first Position before beginning the scene, although you may assign the other Positions in the midst of the scene.

Complications can be what are normally Lieutenants -- mercenaries with machineguns -- but they can also be environmental factors like difficult terrain or ambient distrust of a certain faction. Don't worry; you don't need to come up with most Complications until you're about to use them. Roll a 1d4, 1d6, and 1d8. The result of each die is the number of that kind of die you have available to assign to the Obstacle. If you rolled a 2 on the d4, a 4 on the d6, and a 3 on the d8, the Obstacle would start with 2d4, 4d6, and 3d8 for Complications. Define the first Complication before beginning the scene; the rest you can make up and assign dice as you go.

Instead of making a new Obstacle, you can use one from an earlier scene. After

Obstacles are used, they go into the Library. If you recycle an Obstacle from a prior scene, roll 1d4 and add that many dice to its current Positions. Increase the number of dice of each Complication by one and reduce the die size of any one Complication or Position.

Example: Creating an Obstacle

Judson is creating an Obstacle for Nathan's scene where Shar will begin mining operations. He could make a band of bandits harrying the Mulong workers, or a rival faction who also wants to mine the rich veins of ore, or native tribes who believe the mountain to be sacred ground, but in the end he decides to pit the mountain itself against Shar and the Mulong. He names the mountain the Horizon's Teeth.

For Positions, he rolls the three dice. The d4 comes up a 2, the d6 comes up a 4, and the d8 comes up a 5. He will have two Positions and 4d6 and 5d8 to distribute among them. He creates a starting Position of "The treasures of the earth will remain there" and assigns 5d8 to it. The other Position he leaves undefined, but he knows it will use up the other 4d6, so he writes that in now.

For Complications, he rolls the three dice again. He gets a 3 on the d4, a 2 on the d6, and an 8 on the d8, so he has 3d4 2d6 8d8 to distribute between Complications. He only needs to begin the scene with one, though, so he writes down, "Craggy and treacherous terrain 2d6." The remaining dice he will be able to split up between as many Complications as he likes in the course of the scene.

The Structure of a Scene

At the beginning of a scene, each player running a Leader and the player running the Obstacle declare what they want out of the scene. These are their Stakes. The key to good stakes is *change* -- if the stakes won't change the players' situation on Agora, they aren't stakes, they're window dressing. The different stakes in a scene don't necessarily have to be at odds, or even related, but it helps.

Characters seek their Stakes by tapping into their Ideals and using their Resources. Players roll the corresponding dice and keep them in the corresponding circles on their character sheet.

In the course of a scene, players will use those dice to have their characters make Challenges and take Stands. Challenges are things that the characters do to bring themselves closer to winning their Stakes and keep opposing characters from achieving theirs. Stands are actions that characters take to overcome others' Challenges.

Progress and success are measured in the dice in front of the players. Whoever runs out of dice loses their Stakes; whoever is left wins their Stakes. The winners then narrate their victories and all the players update their characters to reflect the changes wrought by the scene.

Example: Setting Stakes

Nathan wants to build a mine, sure, but what's more important is that he sets up an operation that can provide him with materials he can use for later industry and trade. He declares his stakes as "I want the Mulong to build a mine that forms the cornerstone of an industrial economy."

Jason could go the easy route and deny the Mulong the mine, but that doesn't actually change the situation any -- they *already* don't have a mine. Jason's stakes need to change the situation, so he declares his stakes as "If they fail, the Mulong will be discouraged and abandon plans to build an industrial infrastructure." They'll have to seek some other means of pursuing their Plutonic goals.

Framing the Scene

Whoever plays the opposition frames the first scene. Framing the scene is simply describing the place that the action will begin in, a little colorful detail, and where the principal players in the scene start off.

Example: Framing the Scene

Jason begins Nathan's scene by narrating "It's a grey morning with a lingering threat of rain, and your workers are beating a path up into the mountains to the mining site. The land is uneven and difficult, and rockslides have already taken out the path twice, slowing progress. It's midday by the time the first group of workers arrive at the work site."

Rolling In Dice

Once the scene is set, each player running their own character or the Obstacle rolls dice for an appropriate Ideal and a Resource that the character plans to use to achieve their Stakes. Ideal dice are kept in the top circle on the character sheet and Resources dice are kept in the bottom circle on the character sheet. If you're not using the character sheet, keeping the dice on your left and the right works just fine.

Whenever you make a Challenge, you may roll in new Resource dice from your sheet. You must narrate how those resources are being used in the Challenge your character makes.

Whenever you take a Stand, you may roll in new dice for Ideals on your sheet. You must narrate how that Ideal is being used in the Stand your character makes.

Example: Rolling in Dice

Nathan will start off using his Uprising Ideal and Zin the Scout with the survival skills. He rolls the 4d10 for the Ideal and places the dice in the top circle on his character sheet; then he rolls the 3d6 for Zin and places these dice in the

bottom circle.

Jason will start off with the Position and Complication that he created. He rolls the 5d8 for Positions and places it to the right of the Obstacle sheet, and then rolls the 2d6 for Complications and places it on the left.

Challenges and Stands

Play proceeds around the table clockwise, starting with whoever began the scene.

When it is your turn, your character must make a Challenge. You may roll in new dice as described above and you may reroll as many of your current Resource dice as you like. Select one to seven dice whose total is less than or equal to seven. Narrate your Challenge and how it brings your character closer to your Stakes or makes things harder of one or more of your opponents.

When you have been targeted by a Challenge, you will generally want to take Stand. You may roll in new dice as described above and you may reroll as many of your current Ideals dice as you like. Select one to seven dice whose total is less than or equal to seven. Narrate your Stand and how it frustrates, stymies, or negates the Challenge that was directed at you.

If a player targets one of your Lieutenants with a Challenge, you take the Stand, not the player running the Lieutenant (they have no Ideals of their own -- they follow yours!).

Example: Challenge and Stand

Nathan makes the first Challenge of the scene. He rolls in his 2d6 from Charismatic Exhortation and keeps them with the other Resource dice on his sheet. "Shar is there at the lead of the procession, constantly scaling up spires and precipices, shouting encouragements to the Mulong. 'This planet is untouched by the hand of the oppressors, ripe for our harvesting, ready to fuel the Mulong to seize control of everything that we have been denied before!'" Nathan then points at the two and five that are among his dice. "Two-die challenge."

Jason looks at the dice in front of him. He could define and roll in his second Position, but he decides not to just yet, especially since he has three twos of his own. He points at the three dice. "Three-die Stand. Just as you are up on a tall pinnacle, the ground shakes, upsetting your footing, and you fall to the ground. The rocks below strike against your head, bloodying your face. The mountain doesn't seem to like your speechifying."

Epiphanies

Since you want a set of dice that add up to less than seven, you generally want to roll low. However, if you roll *too* low and get a 1, you generate an Epiphany. Epiphanies are both good and bad. They represent a sudden surge, breakthrough, or insight that gives you a decided immediate advantage. However, Epiphanies are also taxing, and

once its force is spent, the die is removed from your character sheet and cannot be used for the rest of the scene.

If one of your Resource dice rolls a 1, the die generates an Epiphany for that Challenge but is then set aside into your Burnout pool. Burnout represents a mechanical backfire, simple wear and tear, or serious injury and damage. Update your character sheet to reduce that Resource by one die.

If one of your Ideal dice rolls a 1, the die generates an Epiphany for that Stand and is then set aside into your Fallout pool. Fallout represents the challenges and threats to your character's beliefs. The Ideal is *not* reduced by one, although it may be rewritten when you roll Fallout.

Example: Epiphanies

Jason has just made a Challenge to Nathan, narrating how the first mine shafts are unstable and collapsing under the weight of the mountain. He's using his three twos to make the Challenge, and Nathan is getting really tired of those dice. He only has his two and five to make a two-die Stand, so he will lose unless he does something.

Nathan decides to reroll the other Ideal dice (he'll keep the two and five just in case). He comes up with a three and two ones. The two, the three, and the two ones add up to seven, so he can support a four-die Stand. He narrates: "The Mulong do not fear the Mountain, for they know that it only by conquering their fear that they will ever be anything more than slaves. They rush in with support beams and welding equipment, shoring up the sagging structures and strengthening the shafts' stability."

Losing Dice

Compare the number of dice that were used to make Challenges and Stands. If the number of dice for the Challenge is greater than the number of dice for the Stand, the players who the Challenge was directed at lose a number of dice equal to the difference. If the number of dice for the Stand was greater than the number of dice for the Challenge, the player who took the Challenge loses a number of dice equal to the difference. Finally, if the Challenge and Stand were composed of the same number of dice, each player loses one die.

Normally, when you lose dice to a Challenge or Stand, you choose which dice to discard. You may discard the dice in front of you or the dice in front of any of your Lieutenants. You may never discard dice showing ones; they are going away, anyway.

However, when your opposition rolls a one, he has achieved an Epiphany. Instead of you discarding all those high-rolling big clunky dice, he selects the dice that you must discard. Your opponent may choose dice in front of you or dice in front of any of your Lieutenants in any combination.

Any dice that rolled ones are then removed from your pools. Ideal dice that roll ones go into your Fallout pool; Resource dice are Burnt Out, and are simply discarded.

Example: Losing Dice

In Nathan's first Challenge, he had a two-die Challenge and Jason had a three-die Stand. Jason beat Nathan by one die, and Nathan had to discard a die of his choosing. He tossed out one of his d10s that had rolled a 9.

Now Jason's three-die Challenge meets Nathan's four-die Stand. Jason is going to lose a die, but Nathan gets to decide which die it is. Nathan gets rid of one of those pesky twos, depriving Jason of his block of three dice. He sets the two dice that rolled a one aside into his Fallout pool.

Assigning Positions and Complications in Play

When running the Obstacle, players do not determine all of its Positions and Complications ahead of time. Instead, they have a pool of unassigned dice. They may create a new stat and assign dice to it in the middle of the scene, even as part of their Challenge or Stand. They may then roll those dice into their pools and use them immediately.

Example: Assigning Complications in Play

It's Jason's turn to make a Challenge. The Mulong have already bored far down into the mountains, so he decides that they should encounter something dangerous down there. He adds "Lava Flow 3d8" to the Obstacle's sheet, and ticks off 3d8 from the unassigned dice. He rolls in the 3d8 and narrates, "The mining continues apace, and the tunnels bore deep down into the mountains. However, the deepest break through into a lava tube, and the sudden drop in pressure brings bright red lava gushing up into the mine shafts!"

Lieutenants

When you roll in dice from one of your Lieutenants, you may give those dice to one of the other players at the table; they will then play that Lieutenant in the scene. Your Challenge should usually introduce the Lieutenant into the scene and give them some idea of how you expect them to help out.

On their turn, other players running your Lieutenants may use those dice to make Challenges of their own. While you cannot reroll those dice, you can use them to make Challenges and take Stands. Your Lieutenant, on the other hand, can reroll them but may not use your dice for their Challenges. Lieutenants are not required to make Challenges on their turn, but they may only reroll dice if they make a Challenge afterwards.

Unassigned Lieutenant dice may be assigned in the midst of play to retroactively create a new Lieutenant or to make a bystander into a Lieutenant. If there is a player at the table uninvolved in the scene, they may immediately begin playing this Lieutenant.

Example: Lieutenants

It's Nathan's turn to make a Challenge, and he decides to bring in the Old One. He rolls the 3d4 assigned to the Old One and passes the dice over to Judson, who will be playing the Lieutenant. Nathan narrates, "And that night as the first day of labor is completed, the Mulong build a great bonfire outside the mine entrance, and the Old One sings them stories about their toiling for another's gain, and encourages them to work hard tomorrow because their toil is now for their own gain." Nathan then points at the two that he rolled with the Old One's dice and the two and three that he already has. "Three die Challenge."

When it is Judson's turn, he rerolls the two d4s that came up 4s, and gets a two and a one for his trouble. Two plus two plus one is five, and so he uses all three dice for his own Challenge. "The next morning, before anyone else is awake, the Old One stirs the coals of the fire to bring it back to life, singing to himself. As the fire leaps higher, so does the Old One's voice, and soon he is shouting and clapping, waking the workers with a rousing song for their next day of noble labor." He'll lose the die that rolled 1 to Burnout, but his Challenge probably does some damage to Jason's pool.

Surrender

Scenes end when one side decides not to continue and surrenders. Players may only surrender between exchanges of Challenges and Stands; players may not surrender instead of taking a Stand. When a player surrenders, they lose their stakes but do get to narrate a cliffhanger to the end of the scene.

If a player decides to surrender when it is their turn to make a Challenge, they may attempt to gain a Surrender Epiphany. This is an advantage to be used later that the character is able to extract from the conflict despite losing the stakes. The surrendering player rolls their Burnout pool. If any of the dice roll ones, the player may keep one of them to use as an epiphany in a later scene.

If the player is the last to surrender out of a conflict, they earn the right to narrate a cliffhanger, a turnabout at the end of the scene that introduces a surprise or new element to the scene. A good cliffhanger suggests later scenes and conflicts. Cliffhangers cannot negate the stakes that the other side wins, but they can complicate them.

Example: Surrender

Jason can see that he's going to run out of dice if he tries to push through another round. He does not think that he'll be able to get Nathan to roll in his fourth ideal, so he decides to surrender. He waits until the round is over before he surrenders so he can try for an epiphany.

For the epiphany, he rolls his Burnout pool, which consists of a 1d4, a 1d6, and 2d8. He rolls two ones and keeps one of them as an epiphany. The die is recorded on the obstacle sheet for when the Horizon's Teeth is used again in a later scene. It might be used to narrate a collapse of mining tunnels, some misplaced

explosives, or similar advantage.

As his cliffhanger, he narrates that from their vantage atop the mountain range, the miners spot smoke from a settlement's fires off in the distance. They have neighbors -- and judging by the amount of noise they've been making, the neighbors know they're there.

To the Victor, the Spoils

Once one side runs out of dice or surrenders, the scene is almost over. The winners of the scene narrate how everything resolves and how their characters or the Obstacle achieve their stakes.

If you lost, the player who ran your opposition selects one of the Ideals that you used in the scene. Increase its die number by one.

If you beat the Obstacle in your scene (not if you helped someone else in their scene), you win spoils off of the Obstacle's card in the form of Resource dice. Select any one complication that the Obstacle rolled in the scene and strike it off the card. You may then immediately assign equal dice to new Resources on your sheet, bank them for a later (and bigger) payoff, or you may give them to another player. You may split the dice between these three options however you like.

Assigning the dice works exactly like character creation. This represents new resources that you gain by virtue of achieving your stakes or overcoming your Obstacle. You may create new Resources on your sheet or increase the number of dice assigned to Resources already on your sheet. Either way, narrate how the new Resource dice are related to the complication that you got them from. Poisonous snakes might become poison-tipped darts; rough terrain can become fortifications.

Banking allows you to store up your spoils for when your long-term plans take multiple scenes to accomplish. To bank your spoils, you record the dice in the Banked box at the bottom of your character sheet. Each time you beat an Obstacle in a future scene, you may either take the dice back out of the Bank or double the number of dice in the Bank. Each time you lose, however, you must halve the number of dice (rounding up). When you take the dice out of the Bank, you can either assign them immediately or give them to another player. When you assign Banked dice, be sure to narrate how they represent spoils from the Obstacle you just defeated.

You may also want to reward other players who have helped you, or perhaps court their favor for later help. In this case, you may simply hand Spoils dice to another player. They may either immediately assign the dice or bank them.

Example: Spoils

Nathan and Judson beat the Horizon's Teeth. Nathan looks over the Complications that Jason assigned to the mountain and decides he can make use of "Lava Flow 3d8." He strikes that off of the Obstacle card and narrates, "Through

great sacrifice and labor, the Mulong tap the lava flows underneath the Horizon's Teeth, using the heat to power the generators and refining the material into ores that they fashion into all manner of useful items: breastplates, sleds, and replacement parts for the militia, but also trade goods and other things for later use." He adds 2d8 to the Monowire Scythes, adding "and Jungle Sleds" to the name. He puts 1d8 into his Bank.

If Jason won, he'd select one of Nathan's Ideals and increase it by one die, and the Obstacle would go into the Library untouched.

Fallout

Once a scene is over, count up the number of Ideals that you rolled to measure your character's investment in the scene. Your investment determines the die size of your fallout pool and the Obstacle's reward. If you used only one Ideal, the die size is d10; if two, roll d8s; if three, roll d6s; and if you used all four Ideals, your fallout dice will be d4s.

The player who ran your Obstacle immediately adds a number of d10 Resource dice to their Unassigned d10s equal to the number of Ideals you used in the scene.

Count up the dice in your Fallout pool, turn them into the appropriate die size, and roll them.

For each die that rolled four or less, you must add, change, or remove one word from the Ideals you used in the scene.

For each one that you rolled, you must use one of your opponent's keywords to add or replace one of the words in your Ideal. A Keyword is any word that isn't a preposition, article, or conjunction.

Example: Fallout

In the course of the scene, Nathan rolled in three of his Ideals. His Fallout dice will be counted in d6s. For getting Nathan to use three Ideals, Jason immediately adds 3d10 to his unassigned dice on his own character sheet.

Nathan also accrued three Fallout dice over the course of the scene, so he rolls 3d6, getting a four, a three, and a one. He must change three words in his Ideals, and one of them must swap in one of the keywords from the Positions of the Horizon's Teeth. The keyword "treasure" looks useful, so he rewrites his Plutonic Ideal to read, "Greed creates and commerce animates and treasures adorn all worthwhile things."

Death and Renewal

If a player reduces all of his Ideals to zero dice, his community dissolves without anything to bind them together. If a player loses all of his Resources, his community is

swallowed up by Agora. Lastly, a player may retire his character, which is then added to the Obstacle Library.

Whatever the case, the player may create an entirely new replacement character or poach one of the other players' Lieutenants to make into a replacement character.

Creating a new replacement character works exactly as described above, with a number of extra d6 Resource dice equal to the number of Obstacles in the Library.

Alternately, the player may elect to turn a Lieutenant into their new Leader. The Lieutenant may be one on the player's sheet, or one of the Lieutenants created by another player. Any dice that the uplifted Lieutenant represented turn into free dice that the poached player may immediately assign. Roll a Fallout pool equal to all of the Ideals on the sheet the Lieutenant comes from and use the results to rewrite the first three Ideals for the new character. Then assign 10d6 and 10d10 Resources. The Descent scene should entail the Lieutenant's separation from his former leader, which may be friendly, hostile, planned or unplanned, depending on everyone's preferences. Write the fourth Ideal from scratch, somehow including a relationship with the character who was so recently his leader.

Nth Iteration Rules

Once you get used to it, the dice mechanic of Agora is relatively simple. Here are some suggestions for things you can do that might not have been obvious.

Note to Playtesters and Editors: this chapter is very rough, in an inconsistent voice, and will probably be the last thing finalized in the finished game. It is more holding bin for fragments of ideas than a proper chapter. This may change, or it may become Appendix of Neat Tricks.

Player-versus-Player Scenes

Through the course of play, player characters may come into conflict with each other. There's nothing wrong with that, and it can be very entertaining. When two players are opposed, however, the distribution of the other players' roles change. Other players must first play Lieutenants of the Leaders in the scene, divided equally between Leaders. There is only an Obstacle if the number of other players is not divisible by the number of Leaders.

In a three player game with two Leaders in opposition, the third player plays an Obstacle.

In a four player game with two Leaders in opposition, the third and fourth players play Lieutenants, one Lieutenant for each Leader.

In a five player game with two Leaders in opposition, the third and fourth players play Lieutenants and the fifth player plays the Obstacle.

In a five player game with three Leaders in opposition, the fourth player plays an

Obstacle and the fifth player plays a Lieutenant of the Obstacle.

At the end of the scene, the winner selects one of his opponent's Ideals and raises it by one die. He may then either take half of the dice in one of his opponent's Resources as spoils or invite his opponent to select one of his own Ideals and raise it by one die.

Changing Sides

If two players are both running their characters against a common Obstacle and, in the course of the scene, one of the characters has a change of heart, well then... great! Players always direct their Challenges at one or more other players. There's nothing to prevent you from flipping your loyalties and directing your Challenges against the other player, and there's no reason why the Obstacle must continue to target you with its Challenges. If you beat the other player and then surrender, you "lose" the stakes that you had started the scene with (the ones you didn't want any more any way) and one of your Ideals is increased by one die by the Obstacle.

Players should not switch sides when playing Lieutenants, as this more-or-less constitutes a betrayal of trust between players. You are playing the Lieutenant *for* your fellow player, and you should not take advantage of that trust. You are, however, perfectly capable of making Challenges directed against the common Obstacle that may differ from how the other player expects you to act. If you really don't want to slaughter the yetifolk to build that monorail through their territory, you are perfectly allowed to barter with them or attempt other means of pursuing the established stakes.

More than Two Stakes

Each player controlling a player character declares stakes for each scene. This means that there can easily be three or more sets of stakes being resolved in the same scene.

When there is more than one player character confronting a common Obstacle, each player declares his own stakes. Those stakes may be near-identical, or they may be widely divergent. If they beat the Obstacle together and do not oppose each other's stakes, they all win their stakes. If they defeat the scene's Obstacle but don't want their compatriots to gain their stakes, they may start opposing each other. The scene ends when all players who still have dice in their pools allow the other players to have their stakes.

When more than one player plays opposition against a player character, each player declares their own stakes again. They may defeat their common enemy and then all reap their stakes, or they may turn on each other until only one remains. As long as you have dice and oppose another player's stakes, the scene continues.

Swapping in Resources

You've had Mother Courage (2d10) and her Banner of the Fallen (2d6) by your side for ages. In a climactic scene, however, she manages to Burnout all four of her dice. She wiped the floor with that Legionnaire punk, but Mother Courage is gone. You really liked the Banner, though, and it's become pretty central to how you view your community. Assign some of the Resource dice you won thanks to Mother Courage to recreate the Banner of the Fallen, and use some of your unassigned d10s to create a new standard-bearer to take it up. Mother Courage is gone, but her memory lives on.

Refining Resources

You may use your spoils to replace an equal number of differently-sized dice in an existing Resource. This allows you to "upgrade" (or downgrade) a Resource assigned to a Lieutenant. You may then reassign the dice that were replaced (so if you used 2d4 to replace those 2d8s, you can then assign 2d8 somewhere else).

Making the Obstacle Hurt

Oh sure, you can make the new Obstacle some new Overlord Ivan from over the horizon, but it's much more gratifying to key in the Obstacle as a direct challenge to the player's base belief and character concept. That, and it's far more likely to get them to pour in all of their Ideals, which nets you more d10s.

Conversion

You're in the midst of tense negotiations with an Ardent rector whose fanatical army has been giving you trouble. Your Obstacle has rolled in dice for the rector's political savvy and his High Paladin commander. You assign some d10s to the Abbess -- she's been swayed by your conviction and charm, and now she's supporting you in the talks. You can even hand her to an idle player and let him play her on your side.

Betrayal

You're in a player-versus-player scene, and your opponent just Burned Out the last die of one of his Lieutenants. Quick -- assign a couple d10s to a new Lieutenant of the same name, roll in those dice, and hand them to the player who was running the Burnt-Out Lieutenant. The Lieutenant is revealed as a turncoat! Narrate how you got them on your side as part of your Challenge, and watch the damage fly!

Banking for Pacing and Profit

You're going to war against Overlord Ivan to take control of his network of battle satellites and prove that you are the most qualified ideologue to rule all of Agora. You could do the entire war in one scene, sure. Or you could spread it out into a number of separate scenes, each depicting a different battle or negotiation or crisis in the war. Some of the scenes are against Ivan; others are against his allies, third parties, the hostile

environment, or even your own allies. In each of these individual scenes, you bank most or all of the dice you win. If you can stretch it out to four or five scenes, you can have a pretty large slushpile of dice at the end. Then, when you finally crush the Overlord, pull all of the dice out of the Bank and assign them to Global Network of Battle Satellites.

Customizing Agora

What is provided here is a skeleton of a game, compiled under the assumption that you will take it and do as you will with it. Some players will be happy to play with the fiddly bits that have been provided; other players will want to make their own fiddly bits or transplant the game to an entirely new setting. That's great -- here are some suggestions and guidelines for doing so.

Creating your own Factions and Cultures

Write an Ideal that is both evocative and grammatically simple to allow modification in play. Start with 4d6 Resources and 3d10 Lieutenants. Shift one die from one to the other if you like. Turn 2d6 Resources into 1d4 Resources or 1d6 Resources into 2d8 Resources. Do that as many times as you like.

Alternate Settings

It isn't too hard to dream up alternate settings with similar problems and interactions. There are three necessary ingredients:

- 1) lots of people following a handful of ideogogues
- 2) engaged in conflict where the friction is not quite open war
- 3) big stakes of how the whole world works afterwards

Here are some examples:

Generation: *how shall we live?* Life aboard a generation ship on its way to humanity's last hope for survival.

Costumes and Crises: *how shall we live?* The emergence of superpowers reshapes the world.

Thunderdome: *how shall we live?* After the global war, humanity rebuilds itself.

King Philip: *how shall we live?* In 1675, British colonies dot the Atlantic coast in equal numbers as indian settlements. Then the colonists lose contact with the British homeland.

Playtest Feedback

Thanks for taking a look at Agora! I'm eager to hear what you've got to say after reading the manuscript so far, and I'm very eager to hear about any playtesting experiences you have.

If you'd like to post an Actual Play report, I'd be very appreciative. Accounts of actual play are very helpful both for refining the game's mechanics and getting the game in the public eye. AP Reports can be posted to the Forge (<http://www.indie-rpgs.com>), Story Games (<http://www.story-games.com/forum>), or I have my own forum for Kallisti Press (<http://kallistipress.com/forum>). Any of them will do just fine.

Alternately, you can email me directly at *playtesting at kallistipress dot com* either with questions or feedback. I'm looking forward to hearing from you!

-- Josh



Name: _____

Concept: _____

Player: _____

Ideals

Faction

Culture

Background

Descent

Fallout ▲

Reroll in Stands

Resources

Bank
Each time you beat an Obstacle,
assign banked dice or double them.

▲ Burnout

Reroll in Challenges

Unassigned dros

